Joint degrees: the future for agricultural higher education in the EU?
The example of IMRD

Ghent  Berlin  Rennes  Nitra  Pisa  Wageningen
Belgium  Germany  France  Slovakia  Italy  Netherlands
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1. Definitions and models
2. IMRD development as an example
3. Opportunities and challenges of joint degrees
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1. Definitions and models
Definitions and models

- Joint degrees are in general degree programs offered by different institutes.
- In theory this is possible for undergraduate and graduate programs.
- In practice mainly organized at master level because at BA-level added value is limited (basic general training and language barrier) while at PhD level there is mainly no problem as this can be regulated student by student.
Definitions

• **Single degree with curriculum exchange**: this is the situation in which the student receives a degree of one single university but is allowed (or even pushed or obliged) to take courses in one (or sometimes more) partner universities.

• **Double degrees**: this is the situation in which the student follows a substantial part of his curriculum in (at least) two universities and receives two single diplomas signed separately by each of the universities.

• **Multiple degrees**: this is the same situation as above but in a system where there are more than two partners in the consortium.

• **Joint degrees**: real joint degrees are situations in which students are studying in a consortium of universities and can follow courses according to the rules of the consortium in the different partner universities but receives one single common degree undersigned by the different consortium partners.
Advantages of real joint degrees (as compared with other models)

• One single joint degree increases visibility of the degree

• One single joint degree obliges the partners to reflect on common objectives, learning outcomes, quality control system, ...

• One single joint degree allows for larger consortia (at least if there is no requirement of studying at all partners)

• One single degree (at e.g. EU side) allows double degree construction with e.g. non-EU partners
Operational models

• **Model 1:** Each consortium partner institutes offers ± the same curriculum (or learning outcomes) and students can freely choose in which universities they follow each separated building block of the curriculum (mostly organised per semester)

• **Model 2:** Each university offers one of the building blocks of the common program and students switch together over the building blocks or have a limited choice where they can follow each module (except for the thesis semester)

• **Model 3:** One (or a limited number of) partner(s) offer the basic module, after which students can (under specified conditions) select modules in the different partner institutes (combination of model 1 and 2).
2. IMRD development
Erasmus Mundus International Master of Science in Rural Development (IMRD)

Mission: Offering a joint master program that gives students the opportunity to compare world visions on rural development practices and policies and to experience the diversity in its approaches and applications

Objective: To train specialists in Integrated Rural Development with focus on socio-economic and institutional aspects

Operation: 2 year master programme since 2004
Development of IMRD

• First contact within EU Erasmus exchange program among EU partners since the end of the seventies

• Organization of intensive course programs (IPs) since mid of the nineties (with EU Erasmus support)

• First cooperation with non-EU partners under EU alfa program (cooperation with Latin America) in 2000

• Structured master program IMRD under Erasmus Mundus I in 2004 (7 EU partners)

• First contacts with Chinese universities under action 3 in 2006

• Extension of IMRD to US under Atlantis double degree program in 2008

• Extension of IMRD to China (2 partners), South Africa, Ecuador and India under Erasmus Mundus II in 2010

• Extension of IMRD to Vietnam in 2013 and South Korea (EKAFREE double degree) in 2014
European core partners:

- Ghent, Belgium
- Rennes, France
- Wageningen, The Netherlands
- Berlin, Germany
- Nitra, Slovakia
- Pisa, Italy
Organisational structure IMRD Consortium

**IMRD** = Academic consortium of today 6 European + 6 Third Country universities + 1 US + 3 South Korea universities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Europe:</th>
<th>3rd Countries:</th>
<th>ATLANTIS:</th>
<th>EKAFREE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ghent University</td>
<td>Chinese University of Agriculture</td>
<td>University of Arkansas</td>
<td>Korea University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humboldt University of Berlin</td>
<td>Nanjing Agricultural University</td>
<td></td>
<td>Seoul National University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agrocampus Ouest</td>
<td>Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral</td>
<td></td>
<td>Chungbuk National University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pisa University</td>
<td>University of Agricultural Science Bangalore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovak University of Agriculture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wageningen University</td>
<td>University of Pretoria</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can Tho University</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Belgium
- Germany
- France
- Italy
- Slovakia
- The Netherlands
- China
- Ecuador
- India
- South-Africa
- Vietnam
- USA
- South Korea
Today’s IMRD Course scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st YEAR IMRD</th>
<th>2nd YEAR IMRD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>GENERAL ENTRANCE MODULE - 25-35 ECTS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Ghent University</td>
<td><strong>Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development</strong>&lt;br&gt;Agrocampus Ouest (French level B2 required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADVANCED MODULE I - 15-40 ECTS</strong></td>
<td><strong>ADVANCED MODULE II – 15-40 ECTS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Economics and Management&lt;br&gt;Ghent University</td>
<td><strong>Rural Sociology and Development</strong>&lt;br&gt;Wageningen University (only 6 students – see below)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional and Resource Economics&lt;br&gt;Humboldt University</td>
<td><strong>Institutional and Resource Economics</strong>&lt;br&gt;Humboldt University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NOTICE:</strong> It is not possible to choose HUB in SEM 2 AND 3; only one advanced module can be taken at HUB</td>
<td><strong>CASE STUDY 10 ECTS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Slovak University of Agriculture -- University of Pisa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# New IMRD course scheme starting 2015-2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Module</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Partner University</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1st year</strong></td>
<td><strong>GENERAL ENTRANCE MODULE</strong></td>
<td>30-35</td>
<td>Ghent University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SEMESTER I</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ADVANCED MODULE I</strong></td>
<td>15-40</td>
<td>any partner university different from thesis partner university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SEMESTER II</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2nd year</strong></td>
<td><strong>CASE STUDY</strong></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>University of Pisa or Slovak University of Agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SUMMER COURSE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ADVANCED MODULE II</strong></td>
<td>15-40</td>
<td>Thesis partner university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SEMESTER III</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>MASTER DISSERTATION</strong></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Thesis partner university</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>SEMESTER IV</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>
# IMRD student intake

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohorte (years)</th>
<th>Number of applicants</th>
<th>Number of admissions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (13-15)</td>
<td>(676) 364</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (12-14)</td>
<td>(1213) 432</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (11-13)</td>
<td>(557) 377</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (10-12)</td>
<td>(461) 337</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (9-11)</td>
<td>(361) 305</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (8-10)</td>
<td>403</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (7-9)</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (6-8)</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (5-7)</td>
<td>238</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session (4-6)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: (Application incomplete) complete  
Note: (academically accepted) started the course
IMRD student intake

=> 2004-2015: students from 70 different nationalities

Distribution of enrolled students according to gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>♂</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>♀</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# IMRD student succes rate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohort</th>
<th>First year of the master degree programme</th>
<th>Second year of the master degree programme</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013-2015</td>
<td>(30+2) 32</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2014</td>
<td>(22+7) 29</td>
<td>(20+7) 27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011-2013</td>
<td>(14+9) 23</td>
<td>(13+9) 22</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-2012</td>
<td>(22+8) 30</td>
<td>(21+8) 29</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-2011</td>
<td>(20+11) 31</td>
<td>(19+9) 28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-2010</td>
<td>(33+7) 40</td>
<td>(29+7) 36</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-2009</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-2007</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005-2007</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004-2005</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Graduating rates within 3 year in IMRD (batches 2004-2010)**

- Average graduation after 2 yrs (first year drop outs excluded): 89%
- Average graduation after 3 yrs (first year drop outs excluded): 98%
- Proportion graduated (all drop outs included): 92%

- Graduating rates within 3 year in IMRD (batches 2008-2010)
  - Average graduation after 2 yrs (first year drop outs excluded): 54%
  - Average graduation after 3 yrs (first year drop outs excluded): 83%
  - Proportion already graduated (all drop outs included): 80%

**Notes:**

Within the ATLANTIS programme it is not unusual for US students to take a 1 up to 3 year break in between the last courses and the master dissertation defence, during which they have a professional job.
Professional activity of the IMRD Alumni

- PhD: 29%
- Study: 1%
- University: 13%
- NGO: 14%
- Cooperative: 4%
- Private: 11%
- Government: 11%
- UN: 7%
- No activity at present: 9%

Internship: 1%
Joint IMRD diploma

• The **joint diploma** is produced at Ghent University but signed by the legal representative of each of the CPU in accordance with the legislation of the countries of core partner institutes.

• The diploma mentions the name and the degree of the training in English. A legalised translation in partner institutes languages can be obtained on request.

• **Full use of ECTS** (course description, transfer of marks, acceptance of credits, ...)

• **Diploma supplement** with full transcript of all ECTS credits. The diploma supplement mentions the titles of the courses as used at the respective institutes and is signed by the IMRD coordinator.

• Under precise conditions the joint degree can be combined with an other degree in a double degree construction (e.g. Atlantis and EKAFREE)
Flexibility of our model

• Flexibility in adding partners: the model developed by IMRD is a combination of core elements (basic module, 2 advanced modules, case study and thesis module) that are interchangeable (and thus flexible) in following ways:

• For double degrees: for this the equivalence of the basic module needs to be respected (see Atlantis and EKAFREE) meaning that students can do the basic module in both institutes + a general requirement of minimum credits at both sides

• For adding partners: looking to their strengths new partners can be added by allowing them to offer an advanced module or case study on condition that they accept general concepts and quality rules
3. Opportunities and challenges of joint degrees
Opportunities for students

- **High mobility** >> access high level courses at all participating institutes.

- Classes from the best professors in the respective fields

- **International experience** >> exposure to different environments, comparative learning and exposure to different teaching methods.

- Studying in **different language and cultural environments**.

- A **unique combination** of theoretical knowledge and practical based comparative knowledge.
Opportunities for partners

• Exchange of lecturers
• Bringing together strong parts of different programs to a new unique program
• Better students (for later PhD)
• Visiting scholars program
• International contacts
• Joint research possibilities (e.g. in master thesis)
• Comparative knowledge from different countries
Joint Master course: challenges

• International student intake and mobility requirements
• Harmonisation of rules of different partner institutes and quality monitoring
• The changing course curriculum at the partners
• Centralised follow-up of “on the road” students
• Sustainability and the creation of a lively alumni network
Challenges in terms of program

- **Different educational system** in partner institutes => difficult organization

- **Coherence** of program: from loose structure to a more strengthened cooperation and common focus,

- **Language** problems in course offer: now 1 semester in English in each institute but opportunities for language training and extended offer of courses

- Balance between common program and specialization in each institute
Challenges and good practice with respect to program

1. **Coherence of program:** Build on strong points of partners and limit mobility paths by developing a modular structure (integrated course is more than just joint offer of institutes)

2. **Offer of courses:** Find balance between standardization and flexibility, group learning, individual learning, theory and practice and identify good roles for each partner based on their strengths but also on their organization possibilities

3. **Scale and individual learning paths:** do not hesitate to intervene in mobility paths to have enough students per course/module

4. **Quality of course offer:** Use student evaluations for updating program

5. **Scholars program:** Not easy but can create large added value

6. **Language:** Maximize possibilities but be aware that multilingual students are ‘rare’ and that English is already second language for most students

7. **Equivalence of marks:** Use ECTS conversion tables (bidirectional) and make them public to students and use cross evaluation for exams, certainly thesis. Be aware that marking is not only figures, but also philosophy!
Challenges and good practice with respect to development and sustainability

1. **Visibility**: be present where needed, make a good website and spread the word

2. **Attractiveness for EU students**: difficult as added value compared to national degrees is not yet clear (alignment with national degrees)

3. **EU and/or non-academic partners in consortium**: only do it if added value (e.g. thesis, case studies) but be aware that there are sometimes restrictive rules (such as e.g. 3 month rule, no scholarship in home country, ...) making reciprocity difficult

4. **Coherence of network**: develop network gradually and ‘modular’ (see IMRD history) and provide good roles to each partner according to their strengths and capacities

5. **Sustainability**: Try to find different sources for scholarships and make partners also responsible (e.g. for EM+: we make a difference in return per student between partners investing in scholarships and partners not doing so)

6. **Quality monitoring**: Use international systems if possible but be aware that even in these systems a national bias exists and there is low experience with joint masters!
Challenges and good practice with respect to management

1. **Handling of data:** Use an integrated management software (for handling applications, student monitoring, course guide, databases): example E-consort (be aware that amount and complexity of data is huge !)

2. **Different rules/procedures at partner institutes:** Find balance between rules of coordinating institute and other institutes (standardize where possible, be flexible where needed) and create good routines

3. **Work load:** Find balance between central and decentralized structure

4. **Finances:** ‘Just retour between work and money’. Make sure that central structure has enough resources. Find ‘backing’ in your own institute!

5. **Visa:** Still not harmonized in EU, Schengen visa are only for ‘tourism’. Build relations with embassies

6. **Mixture of degrees:** go for a real joint degree as it increases visibility and makes management easier (although central management of universities think differently !)

7. **Social problems:** create family spirit so that students help each other !

8. **Bureaucracy (e.g. of EACEA):** Cope with it: but speaking helps !
4. Conclusions
- EU international education program tools allow to build gradually a real international program

- Real joint degrees are an asset for institutions and students but we should promote it more to the outside world

- Involving new partners should happen in steps in order to build trust and mutual understanding

- Structured programs do yield better long term results (both for teaching and research) than mass exchange programs

- Involving non-EU partners is enriching for both students as scholars
Thank you for your attention!

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